

Encouraging Words

...Let us encourage one another... Hebrews 10:25

Encouraging Words 2024 Volume 4 Issue 1

IN THIS EDITION

- >> A MARTYR FOR CHRIST
- >> A LETTER FROM SISTER MONICA
- >> NEW BEGINNINGS
- >> EXAMPLE TO FOLLOW



FROM PASTOR CHUCK

Thank you Brothers and Sisters, from both North and South Carolina for all of the contributions that you have submitted for this edition! It has been a joy to read them, and they have helped fill my “encouragement tank!” They have given me plenty to think about as well! I’m sorry we couldn’t get all that were submitted in this issue, but will try to include them in our next one.

I was excited to serve at a Proverbs 226 Ministry “Forgive Me, Dear” event in December and am looking forward to serving with another Forgiven Ministries “One Day With God Camp” in March. If one or both of these ministries comes to your institution, with their powerful one-day experiences with your children, I highly recommend that you participate! The fun, food, games and program will bless both you and your children!

Kairos Retreats are special 4-day retreats inside of your institutions where outside volunteers serve you with a lot of food, creative activities, worship and messages about the love, truth and forgiveness of Jesus. If one is offered at your facility, I strongly encourage you to register – they’re wonderful! My wife and I will be serving with Kairos retreats at Central Prison and NCCIW in early March. If you are a Kairos graduate and would like to write a note/letter of encouragement that we can read to our new Kairos participants, please send it to me at the address given under “Be a Contributor” on the last page. Your words and testimonies will mean a lot! You can see a sample letter from Brother Christopher G. in our previous edition of Encouraging Words.

God bless you Brothers and Sisters! It is my joy and pleasure to serve King Jesus and grow with you!

H E S A I D I T

BROTHER JOHN, “My favorite scripture right now is Luke 17:15, ‘Lord, increase our faith!’ It seems to apply to every situation and season! I’m officially a chaplain assistant!... Eleven men recently got baptized here, and weekly men are accepting Christ!

My workout group is over 10 men now, and F3 seems to be a great fishing tool to bring men to faith. The three F’s – Faith, Fellowship and Fitness...

I am amazed at the hedge He puts around me and allows His light to be used through me. My conviction is a great hurdle, but God uses anyone He wants. It is truly humbling to serve, and I’m allowing him to mold me!”

BROTHER JAMES H., “Pray for the safety and sanity for us serving behind walls, and that we may learn to serve God while we serve our time.”

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.”
Colossians 3:12

A Martyr for Christ — Brother Josh J.

The foundation for the Church was not poured with concrete, it was poured with blood. Not just the blood of Jesus, but thousands of martyrs who willingly died for their faith. Today we can only read about the monstrosities that the early church had to suffer.

Some of them included: being stoned to death, being fed to wild animals, being chained to a stake and burned alive, beheadings, and numerous other types of sadistic tortures. Many were given the opportunity to avoid such a fate if they would recant their faith and deny Christ, but most chose death instead.

These realities are difficult for most of us to comprehend today because we've always lived in a land endowed with religious freedom, but it was a very real reality for the first few centuries of the newly-established Church. They knew to accept Christ meant the possibility of death, torture, or both.

So what if death was the price today? Would you still want to follow Christ? Would you be willing to pay for your faith with your own blood? Would you be willing to endure humiliation,

torture, and even death for the sake of Christ? Or would you deny Christ and renounce your faith?

Andrew Bibk in his book entitled "Something Worth Suffering For" says, "If our faith is not solid enough to endure to the point of death then it is not yet solid enough to carry us through the life He wants us to live."

More than likely you will never be in a position where God asks you to be burned alive for your faith or fed to hungry lions, but He has asked you to pick up your cross and follow Jesus ([Matthew 16:24](#)).

Your cross may look different than mine, but they all accomplish the same purpose, and they all lead to the same place - Golgotha. It means "skull" and it represents death. Maybe not a physical one, but a death nonetheless. God is asking you to die to yourself; to die to sin; and to die to the world. He is asking you to become a martyr for your faith, or as Paul says, "a living sacrifice" ([Romans 12:1](#)).

For most of us death can be a frightening thing. We don't even like to think about death, much less

partake of it. But the interesting thing about this particular death is that we're promised eternal life on the other side of it.

Jesus said, "Whoever loses his life for me will find it" ([Matthew 16:25](#)), or in other words, we must be willing to die with Christ if we truly want to live with Christ: the old must die in order for the new to live.

Death is not something we should fear or run from, it's something we should embrace because we cannot partake in the power of His resurrection unless we first are willing to partake in the weakness of His crucifixion.

God empowered the early Church to endure their crosses. Some died horrific deaths, but they never wavered in their faith because they had learned to rely on a power greater than themselves. That same power is available to us today. And, just as it saw the early church through their deaths, it will see us through ours.

Be encouraged because death is not the end, it's a new beginning. **Death could not defeat Christ and it cannot defeat you.**

Holiday Praise

The believer has so many spiritual blessings that it really should be the "holiday season" 365 days a year. When Jesus fulfilled the Father's will on that cross, we were given numerous gifts - gifts that are unfathomable but accessible! This season, I charge all who are in Christ to focus on the unequalled blessings we all share. Let us rejoice in the redemption, adoption, and justification that Jesus has given us. Let us look forward to the promises of God as well - our future glorification and eternal wellbeing in His presence! This holiday season I am thankful for Jesus, for He is worthy! God is fully glorified in us, when we are fully satisfied in Him!

Brother Greg

A Letter from Sister Monica

Dear Pastor Chuck,

Thanks so much for your recent sermon! I want you to know I came to prison a lost soul in June, 2022. I was allowing prison to do me instead of me doing my time. It wasn't because it was "Easter Sunday" that I went to church - it was because I wanted to go to church no matter what day it was! God moved mountains in me. I was on an outside chair in the aisle way and I wept like a baby. I felt like I was the only one in the room that day. So powerful!!

Ever since 4/9/23 I've been a changed woman! I've been reading my Recovery Bible every morning. I've since then worked my 12 Steps to Recovery to the end, written in my journal - "Spiritually" and not just "because," and I've almost finished a workbook called "Finally Free - A Seven Week Journey to Freedom from Your Past" by Jennifer Kostyal. I recommend anyone - not just women - to take this journey with her! It's an eye-opener for sure!

Since all this has been happening in my life, I've reconnected with family and a dear friend that I'd lost my relationship with due to the effects of my "addictive behaviors." My step-father has started talking to me again, and after a year is now telling me He loves me again. He is coming to see me soon. I got my relationship back with him - he's not my step-dad- HE IS MY DAD!

I got my brother back after not seeing or talking to him for almost 3 long years. He and his wife just came to see me! What a glorious day God made that for me! My mom's been my sole supporter here, but we've gotten closer again and she says she loves seeing this new change in me!

My 10-year old son, Pierce, comes to see me all the time! I'm in MATCH (Mothers and Their Children) here, and we get 3 hours once a month. My son is attending church activities now and just went to Camp Hope. He says he's going to be a volunteer there one day for kids like himself...crying moment... My story isn't over by any means...it's just beginning! God has got so much planned for me and through me.

GOD'S REWARDS

I have always been a person who made split second decisions. I have also believed that I am in control of my future. I have always believed that hard work equals getting rewards. Most important is that I have always been the kind of person to put in 110% to whatever I do - If I am good, I am very good; If I am bad, I am very bad. The idea of waiting on God is foreign to me.

Prison is not a place that rewards good behavior. There is punishment if you are caught breaking a rule, but often even those who are breaking rules are rewarded with special treatment. It is something that has frustrated me over and over. From my naive perspective, I thought that God would make sure that I would be rewarded with things I wanted. But that is not how God works. I can get so focused on what I want and think is right, that I miss out on the blessings that God is giving me right now. Then I have no peace and I get angry and frustrated. This can snowball into me acting in ways that do not bring glory to God.

Here are some scriptures that have helped me to have faith that God knows best and that in His timing, things will be made right so that I can live in peace in the here and now...

Psalm 40:1-2 Wait on the Lord

Jeremiah 29:11 He has a plan

Isaiah 43:1-5 He loves us and will not leave us

Matthew 6:25-33 Do not worry

Matthew 7:7-8 Ask and receive

Philippians 4:11-13 Be content, Jesus is our strength

Nehemiah 8:10 The joy of our Lord is our strength

God is good, He can be trusted, He is faithful, He is peasant, and He wants to give us the absolute best!

Sister Jorgie

FOREVER LOVE

1 John 4:14

"We love Him because He first loved us."

Over the years I have told many people about the redeeming blood of Christ. Some have seen the radical transformation from the "old man" to the "new man" in Christ. Some have heard of the old man and are surprised to see the new man in Christ. The common question that I'm asked is, "How?" My answer is this: I prayed that God allow me to love Him more and more each day that He has given me. The more in love I am with Him, the more obedient I want to be because I don't want to let Him down or disappoint Him. The more I love Him, the more I want to give of myself to Him and glorify Him in all that I do and say. Loving Him more allows me to grow in leaps and bounds. I want to leave you with 1 Corinthians 13:13. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three, but the greatest of these is love." When we are finally in our eternal home in heaven, we have no need for faith because everything will be in our sight. We no longer have to hope because we'll be experiencing heaven. Oh, but our love of God will be forever and ever, Amen! Our love for God has no end!

Brother Anselmo

GOOD NEWS FROM BROTHER JOSH

"Hi Chuck! Just wanted to share some good news with you really quick. There's a new guy in my block who is showing quite an interest in learning about God and salvation. Today we spent 3 HOURS going over scripture, and I explained to him our need for a Saviour. The cool thing is that at the end when I was explaining our need for a new heart and a spiritual birth, he asked me to pray for him so that he could receive a new heart and a new nature!

His name is J. and I prayed that God would draw him and quicken him by His Spirit. It was pretty cool, too, because everyone who was in the dayroom could hear me, but I didn't care. God gave me a spirit of boldness and my only focus was on Him and J. Anyway, I wanted to ask you to please keep J. in your prayers and I also wanted to brag a bit on God who has brought me so far. Thanks a lot brother! To God be ALL the glory!!"

I replied to Jay and this was in his reply.

"... It literally brings me to tears that God could use a nobody like myself to serve His purposes. I'm convinced that He can take ANYONE and remake them again a second time, restoring everything that the first Adam lost and much more. God is truly Amazing! As the book I recently read says, He truly makes the common (or unclean) holy. Who but God could do such a thing?!"

Example to Follow - Brother Nathan

The example that we are commanded to follow is Jesus Christ. And Jesus is the perfect example of forgiveness. Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing" Luke 23:34. Jesus said this while hanging on the cross with nails in his hands and feet, after being whipped with straps that ripped flesh from his body, after men spat in His face and after beaten beyond recognition. Jesus was totally innocent of any sin or crime, yet He showed forgiveness to everyone who was torturing him.

When Jesus says to "turn the other cheek" (Mathew 5:39), that means to immediately forgive the person who wronged you. You don't get angry, you don't want to retaliate - you are humble, and do to others as you would want done to you. Even if you are innocent, and the other person is wrong - You forgive. And this applies even in prison - especially in prison. Always act as Jesus would act in every situation. "For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:14-15.

The Christian race is not a sprint, a quick race to see how fast you can run. The Christian race is a very long marathon that lasts our entire lives. Jesus commands us in Matthew 5:48 "to be perfect, just as our Father in heaven is perfect." This is not a suggestion, it is a command. This perfection is what we are working towards and striving for our entire lives. It is something we must work on every day.

Every morning we wake up, the goal is to live our day just like Jesus would. In every action and every thought we have, we must be like our example, Jesus. We should want to serve other people as Jesus did. Be a servant. In John, 15:13 Jesus said, "I have given you an example - you should do for each other what I have done for you." I believe Jesus wasn't talking about washing people's feet, but about being a servant. Our goal as CHRISTians is to be just like Christ, (1 John 2:6). "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." John 13:17.

TREES & FORESTS Devotional books and magazines are good and give us a lot of great inspiration about the "trees/truths" within the "forest/the Bible."

But, if we never read the Bible books in their entirety, we'll often fail to understand where particular trees/stories fit within that forest and about other important trees located close to it.

Reading complete books of the Bible is critical for us to get a fuller interpretation and appreciation of what God is trying to teach us.

So for 2024, I want to encourage you to read Bible books from start to finish. If you are looking for a place to begin, start with the Gospel of Mark - it's full of Jesus in action and power!

And, if you want to read the whole Bible through, check out the Blue Letter reading plan in Volume 1, Issue 3 of this newsletter.

Pastor Chuck

New Beginnings

A new beginning
started inside of me,
by accepting Christ
and knowing Satan is the real enemy.

It began very small
like a mustard seed,
now it's so large
the world can see,
that I am a branch
and He is the tree.

I only produce good fruit now,
I'm done with the bad,
sin robbed me
of all that I ever had,
then left me
broken and defeated,
until I opened up the Bible
and began to read it.

I took it to my Father,
I fell on my knees,
I asked God for forgiveness
and He heard and answered me.

My sins are now forgiven
cast into the sea
gone and forgotten
for all eternity.

It's nothing I have done,
but what He did for me,
by sending His only begotten Son,
to die on Calvary.

It's through the blood of Jesus Christ
that we are all saved,
and it's because of His sacrifice,
we can find our way.

Jesus died on the cross
and rose on day three,
this is no fairytale
it's God's prophecy.

He healed the sick
and made the blind man see,
He laid down his life
so we may be set free.

A new beginning
is waiting there for you,
Believe, repent, and follow him
is all you have to do.
Jesus Christ did it all for you.
John 3:16

Brother Edward

Daily Covering Prayer

(Brother Robert received this prayer while he was at Central Prison, and he prays this every morning when he wakes up. It's blessed him and may it benefit you as well!)

Heavenly Father, I pray this prayer in the power of the Holy Spirit. In the name of Jesus Christ, I bind, rebuke and bring to no affect all division, discord, disunity, strife, anger, wrath, murder, criticism, condemnation, pride, envy, jealousy, gossip, slander, evil speaking, complaining, lying, false teaching, false gifts, false manifestations, lying signs and wonders, poverty, fear of lack, fear of spirits, murmuring spirits, complaining spirits, religious spirits, occult spirits, witchcraft, spirits including Jezebel, Delilah and Apollyon, and the spirit of the Antichrist.

I bind all these curses that have been spoken against me. I'll bless those who curse me and pray blessings on those who despitefully use me. I bind all spoken judgments made against me and judgments I have made against others. I bind the power of the negative words from others and I bind and render useless all prayers not inspired by the Holy Spirit, whether psychic, soul force, witchcraft or counterfeit tongues that have been prayed against me. I am your child. I resist the devil. No weapon formed against me shall prosper. I put on the whole armor of God. I take authority over this day, in your name, Jesus. Let it be prosperous for me. Let me walk in your love, Lord. The Holy Spirit leads and guides me today. I discern between the righteous and the wicked. I take authority over Satan and all his demons, and those people who are influenced by them. I declare Satan is under my feet and shall remain there all day.

I am the righteousness of God in Christ Jesus. I am God's property. Satan, you are bound from my family, my mind, my body, my home and my finances. I confess that I am healed and whole. I flourish, am long-lived, stable, durable, incorruptible, fruitful, virtuous, and full of peace, patience and love. Whatsoever I set my hands to do shall prosper, for God supplies all my needs. I have authority over Satan, all demons and all beasts of the field. God, I pray for the ministry you have for me. Anoint me for all you have called me to do for you. I call forth divine appointments, open doors of opportunity, God ordained encounters and ministry positions. I claim a hedge protection around myself, my spouse, my children, my grandchildren and my family (names) throughout this day and night. I ask you God, in the name of Jesus, to dispatch angels to surround me, my spouse, my children, grandchildren and family today. Put them throughout our houses and around our cars, souls and bodies. I involve angels to protect my family and me from any harmful demonic or other physical or mental attacks. I ask this prayer in the name of Jesus. Amen



DISCIPLESHIP TIP

Hopefully most of you are already in the habit of reading good nonfiction literature. I believe this practice is mandatory if we want to expand our mind and learn to operate at our full potential. However, if we are not retaining what we read, then we are not reaping the full benefit of this practice. For years I read book after book until I finally realized I was not retaining much of the information I was reading. I've discovered that in order for me to learn something, I have to go over it again and again repetitiously. I believe this is true for most of us. If we only read a book, but do not take the time to take notes on it and digest it, we will quickly forget it. Then, essentially, we've done nothing more than waste our precious time and energy.

I have come up with the following method to assist with reading retention. The next time you read a book, consider highlighting or marking all of the important passages that really speak to you. Once you've completed the book, go back and record all of the highlighted passages in a notebook so you will have them for later use. I like to think of it as sifting out all of the "gold nuggets," then storing them in a vault, in this case a notebook, for later use. You can go back and reflect on these golden nuggets of the book again and again and realistically even memorize many of them. This is much easier and more effective than reading the entire book again. This method has significantly increased my ability to retain and apply the knowledge I learned from a book, therefore allowing me to get the most out of my time and effort. My sincere hope is that it will do the same for you.

Brother Josh J.

COUNT IT ALL JOY

– Brother Archie –

Back in the summer of 2012 my mother was diagnosed with stage four lung cancer. Being the type of person that likes taking charge of a situation and helping out if I can, that's what I wanted to do. Unfortunately this time it was out of my hands, and I couldn't do anything. Having feelings of anxiety and hopelessness, I began praying to God, relying on Him because that's all I had. I realized I had to let go of the preconceived notions that I could do everything on my own.

It's hard to lose a loved one, even though I knew her death was inevitable. My prayers weren't for her healing. Instead I prayed for her comfort, that God wouldn't let her suffer and for Him to take her as quickly and painlessly as possible. Did I agree with Him? No! My feelings overcame me knowing it was for the best. It wasn't my plan that mattered—it was God's plan

that I should be concerned with.

Through this, unbeknownst to me, God was working His plan, allowing me to develop and deepen my personal relationship with Him, maturing me, becoming more dependent upon Him, opening up to Him in prayer, expressing my feelings, and establishing the communication He was seeking from me. God knows what we have need of before we ask, He just wants us to be aware when we call on Him that He delivers whatever we ask to fit His perfect will.

The night my mother passed I was drawing a picture of her. I finished it around 7:30 p.m. and a sense of peace came over me. I found out the next day that she had died about the same time I finished the drawing.

What I have learned from this experience is when

going through trials, never ask God "Why?" - be quiet and listen, accepting what you're going through because God is trying to get your attention. The question you should be asking is, "How do I learn from this and use it to glorify God?"

God speaks to you through trials in your life, to make you stronger and at times bring you joy. How can you have joy in the loss of a loved one? Even though I was going to miss Mom greatly, I had joy knowing she never had to face the sicknesses or diseases of this world again. I also had joy knowing that she was in a place of peace until that one day I will see her again, wherever God so ordains it.

James 1:2-3 says "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations, knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience." God is never looking for you to fail

when He allows you some discomfort through a trial. He's checking to see if you will persevere, building you up to where you can face any battles that still lay ahead. If we let a single trial define us, Satan will have control over that weakness to defeat us every chance he gets.

At times it may seem like God isn't around or doesn't care, but these are the times He's closest to you. No matter what challenges you are going through in life, even if it seems more than you can handle, if you rely on God, He's going to be there beside you, walking hand-in-hand, pulling you through. There's nothing you cannot accomplish in everyday life situations with God's help backing you. If you are willing to accept His guidance and know what you're going through is for the best according to His plan, you will always prevail.

Romans 8:28

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?

It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden.

Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Matthew 5:13-16

Testimony Letter from Brother Marcus

“Hey there Pastor Chuck, I pray that all is well with you and your family. Pastor Chuck, since Covid first struck, things have been really hard for me spiritually without me realizing it - mainly due to my carnality. I was lost and didn't know it. The activities in which I partook sent me further from Christ and our Father, but never Him from me. I came to this realization when at a really low point (I wish to spare the details), I was forced to cry out to the Lord. I had little faith, if any at all, and knew not what to believe. So many different things among so many different cultures. Who is right? God who are you? Please show me your truth so that I may worship you correctly and fully.

The events that followed my many nights of praying for God to reveal His truth to me lead me to where I am today with my faith. I was shipped from Central Prison spontaneously, not on my appointment day, and landed in ___ Correctional. Here was a place I found myself wanting to be. It was a carnal paradise for someone incarcerated. There were drugs aplenty and opportunities for lustful desires to be fulfilled if one didn't fill himself with His Word, which I was not. It was peaceful on another note and filled with many time occupying activities and programs for development and rehabilitation for inmates. But at the same time, these interested me not. I was living carnally.

This lasted all of five weeks when half of the camp suddenly closed down due to a lack of staff. Out of an inmate population of 460, 230 were shipped out. I was among 30 inmates sent to ___ Correctional. The stories I'd heard gave me great concern and motivated me to try to be shipped from this place, all to no avail. I was stuck, felt trapped, and full of despair. Then something amazing took place. God revealed Himself to me. He orchestrated these recent events in my life so that I can come into contact with His truth.

It changed my way of thinking about God, and His existence was proven to me. It washed away all doubt that lived deep within the recesses of my consciousness. Here I found the truth which I undoubtedly and wholeheartedly believe in. God sent me to __ Correctional for education and training; to get instruction in His Word; to learn about His commandments and the church; and for training in Christian conduct and obedience to Him. To help me with these things He gave me a family and reminded me of the one I already had. A group of men I have been blessed with here are truly a lamp in a dark tunnel. They challenge me every day to love, which covers the entirety of the law. I have been truly blessed to be called upon by the Father to be a part of God's true church. I am far from perfect and I am constantly in need of Christ intercession on my behalf with the Father. I know that I must endure till the end to be saved Matthew 24:13.

Behind the Door

I lost my freedom,
but chains and shackles gave me my new life.
You told me when to eat,
but I've already been filled.
You locked my door shut,
just so I could get stronger.
You reminded me that my life was over,
so I found a new beginning!
All of your restrictions, rules, and procedures,
have formed my character.
So now when my door slams,
and there's no one around,
It's there where I find my peace.
Be still in Jesus, for I was once lost,
but now I'm found!

Brother Jeffery

*“Therefore,
as God's chosen people,
holy and dearly loved,
clothe yourselves with
compassion,
kindness,
humility,
gentleness
and patience.”*

~

Colossians 3:12

Many of you know that **PRISON ALLIANCE** offers free Correspondence Bible Study lessons to anyone who is seeking to grow in their faith. Every completed lesson is sent to a volunteer who provides encouraging feedback to the student.

But, did you know that Prison Alliance/Christian Library International also has a variety of other Bible studies available for you through your Edovo App? The list includes: "Taming the Tongue," "Persevering in Hard times," "10 Misconceptions about Christianity," "Forgiveness" and more so check 'em out!

You can enroll

in their Correspondence Bible Study lessons through your chaplain or by writing:

PRISON ALLIANCE
PO BOX 97095
Raleigh, NC, 27624.



BE A CONTRIBUTOR

This newsletter is written by and for incarcerated Brothers & Sisters. If you have an encouraging story, a teaching, a charge, a poem or drawing that you think would encourage others, send it to us!

Do your best to limit your articles to 3-4 paragraphs or less. All articles will be subject to light editing for grammar, sentence structure & clarity. We will identify you by your first name, and maybe last initial, unless you tell us not to use it.

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